A Halt in 'Politics' At Agencies Urged

By Carole Shifrin 6-9-74
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Five senators, including three key Senate chairmen, have urged President Nixon to drop "political clearance" procedures for top staff positions at independent regulatory agencies.

In a letter to the President, the senators said the application of the current system to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which is in the midst of fighting the system, and other independent regulatory agencies "is both unwise and inappropriate."

"Clearly, if our objective is to create truly independent regulatory agencies, the members of those agencies should have the flexibility to hire key personnel to implement the policies of that agency and not the policies of any particular administration," they wrote.

Signers of the letter were Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Warren G. Magnuson (D-Wash.), Government Operations Committee Chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), Post Office and Civil Service Chairman Gale W. McGee (D-Wyo.), Commerce Consumer Subcommittee Chairman Frank E. Moss (D-Utah), and Sen. Lawton Chiles (D-Fla.).

Since December, the fledgling Consumer Product Safety Commission has been fighting for Civil Service Commission approval of five top staff people as holding "noncareer executive assignments" status. Robert E. Hampton, chairman of the Civil Service Commission, contends, however, that federal regulations allow such classification only for people who will:

- Be deeply involved in advocating and supporting administration programs.
- Participate significantly in determining major poltical policies of the administration.
- Serve principally as personal assistant to or adviser of a presidential appointee or other key political figure.

The senators' letter called it "unwise and inappropriate" to apply these rules to independent agencies, which are supposed to operate "in an atmosphere free of outside influence."

They called on the President to promulgate new regulations allowing each regulatory agency to appoint a limited number of key officials whose function in the agency would be similar to that of a "noncareer executive assignment" in an executive department — that is, "advocacy of agency programs and support of their controversial aspects; significant participation in the determination of major agency policies, or serving principally as a personal assistant to or adviser of a presidential appointee."

Civil Service Commission Chairman Hampton has repeatedly suggested that the Product Safety agency redesignate the five jobs as career, civil-service jobs.

Four commission members, including chairman Richard O. Simpson, have rejected the suggestion and repeated this week that it is unacceptable. A fifth member — Barbara H. Franklin, a former White House talent scout — has declined to join the others in their "independence" fight.